

FEDERAL PROMOTION AND ASSIGNMENT SYSTEM

Summary

- o Standards and procedures for promotion and assignment within a large part of the Federal establishment are monitored by the Civil Service Commission, pursuant to the Government's merit promotion policy.
- o The merit promotion policy, predicated upon supportive systems such as position classification, qualification standards and evaluation procedures, seeks to ensure that promotions and assignments of employees are based on their individual merit (as evidenced by their qualifications for the specific job involved).
- o Under the merit system, promotions and assignments are closely linked. In effect, promotion is a derivative of a decision in individual cases that employees are qualified for assignments upward, as differentiated from lateral movements.

General

As a demonstration of the fact that the Government's assignment and promotion systems are interrelated, general assignment policy is covered concurrently in the Federal Personnel Manual within the section on promotion.

The Federal merit promotion policy, administered by the Civil Service Commission, provides the means for assuring that systematic procedures are followed and promotions are made on the basis of merit. Exceptions to the policy must have the prior approval of the Commission.

Basic Merit Promotion Principles

Agencies must develop and administer plans that apply merit promotion guidelines to positions filled by promotion.

These plans establish the methods to be followed in selecting employees for promotion to positions grouped together for promotion purposes. Each plan identifies: the positions covered, the areas where the agency can reasonably expect to locate enough qualified candidates, methods of

locating candidates, qualification standards, evaluation procedures, and ranking and selection.

Positions shall be grouped in accordance with specified criteria.

Each promotion plan specifies the positions to which it applies. Positions may be grouped in a plan by job series, grade level, occupational field, organizational subdivision, geographic location, a combination of these factors or any other logical grouping. If supervisory positions are not covered by separate plans, they should be covered by separate provisions within the promotion plans applicable to them.

Minimum areas of consideration shall be as broad as practicable to provide enough highly qualified candidates for promotion and to give employees adequate opportunities for promotion. Consideration shall be given to employees outside these minimum areas when appropriate and necessary to achieve these objectives.

"Areas of consideration" are fields in which an agency makes a search for eligible candidates during a specific promotion action. "Minimum areas of consideration" are those areas designated by a promotion plan in which the agency can expect to locate enough highly qualified people to fill the vacancies. The nature and size of the minimum area vary with the types of positions involved and the qualifications required. Generally, the minimum area of consideration is supposed to be broadened as grades increase and the number of eligible candidates decrease. All employees within the minimum area must have an opportunity to be considered for promotion to positions for which they are eligible. If vacancies are announced, consideration may be limited to those who apply. Provision is also made in promotion plans for considering employees outside the minimum area of consideration. This is done by systematically, extending the area of consideration when the minimum area fails to produce enough highly qualified candidates or by accepting voluntary applications from elsewhere in an agency or outside of it.

Minimum qualification standards used for promotion are CSC standards, including factors for inservice placement and appropriate selective placement. Candidates who meet minimum qualification standards are considered eligible for promotion.

1. minimum qualification standards (eligibility)
2. selective qualification factors (language ability, previous ability in functions area, special skills etc.)
3. job-related evaluation criteria which go beyond the standards for basic eligibility.

Selective placement factors, such as knowledge of a language or proven ability in a functional area, are used in determining eligibility when these factors are essential to successful performance in the position to be filled. Promotion plans covering positions for which Commission standards require a written test for inservice placement must include the written test requirement and the rating standards prescribed by the Commission.

Appropriate job-related evaluation criteria are used to differentiate among the eligible candidates so as to identify the best qualified ones.

Job-related evaluation criteria that go beyond the standards for determining basic eligibility are used to permit meaningful ranking of eligible candidates. In establishing these criteria, an agency may take into account, when appropriate, both the requirements of the position to be filled and the future needs of the organization.

The selecting official is given an adequate number of highly qualified candidates from whom to choose.

Qualified candidates may be identified by means of rank order or by grouping employees into two or more categories. Promotion plans must specify the criteria for identifying candidates as highly qualified. Selecting officials should be provided enough information about the qualifications of candidates (experience, training, education) to make a sound choice. They must also be informed of any awards received by the candidates and must be given supervisory appraisals on them. In certifying candidates to a selecting official, 3 - 5 of the best candidates for a position should be certified. If the best qualified candidates in an area of selection are not highly qualified, then the area of selection must be expanded.

Selection should be made without discrimination and without favoritism.

An agency must adopt adequate procedures to provide equal opportunity in its promotion program for all its qualified employees. Promotions must be made without regard for race, color, religion, sex, national origin, politics, marital status, physical handicap, age or membership or non-membership in an employee organization.

Federal Promotion Assignment System and Practice

The above statement summarizes major features and requirements applicable to most Federal agencies. Within the standards set, it is apparent that substantial latitude and responsibility exist within the agencies to establish specific policies and procedures which largely govern the daily operations of the assignment and promotion programs. In order to gain a first-hand insight into the details involved, e.g., vacancy announcements, establishment of competitive groups, completion of forms, panel procedures, and use of computer information, it is necessary to look at the assignment and promotion systems from an Agency vantage point. The Plans Staff/OP will undertake this review.

Committees of personnel officials, study groups and other communication outlets have provided considerable evidence that there is a substantial difference between the formal objectives and requirements of the system and results in practice. Any summation of alleged criticisms would include the following:

- a. There is a widespread feeling among employees that merit promotion procedures do not enhance the merit selection of people for promotion.
- b. The publicity given to promotion policy often leaves the impression that everyone will be promoted. This is neither realistic nor a basic objective of policy.
- c. The system usually results de facto in the selection of prospects known to the selecting official, usually within or nearby his office. The delays and administrative actions required to act upon assignments and promotions are sources of discontent and charges of manipulation.
- d. Under the Merit Promotion Program management seems to take action on promotions (which may be quite meritorious) and then documents the actions to meet specified procedural requirements.
- e. There are not enough minority promotions.
- f. Supervisors often make oral promises of promotions to individual employees prior to decisions being made on promotion.
- g. A recurring problem is the time required to get current supervisory appraisals on all employees involved in a promotion consideration.